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The "Letter of the Six"

On the Political (Sub)Culture of the Romanian Communist Elite

CRISTINA PETRESCU

One of the public demands that emerged with the Revolutions of 1989 was the restitution of national history free of the ideological meaning imposed by the communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Obviously, the most altered part of the past was exactly the communist one, which was continuously written and rewritten according to the interests of the political elite at a particular moment. Fifteen years after, the meaning of this period in Romanian history is yet far from being assessed. Public interest in the communist past, however, is already fading away, while the political detour enforced upon Romania after the Second World War would symbolically come to an end with the approaching admission into the European Union. Obviously, the communist period should not be left behind as if it had been just an interruption of the "normal" evolution. On the contrary, it should be understood as an integral part of recent history, one that decisively influenced patterns of thought and behavior, transforming the political (sub)cultures¹ in this country. In fact, the legacies of communism are quite often invoked by political analysts, politicians, or journalists to explain the protracted and sinuous transition to democracy in Romania, but what these legacies mean is rather vague.

Although the study of this controversial past that is of primary importance for the study of the transition from communism, little has been done so far to research and interpret it, and ultimately define its "legacies". Since 1989, only a handful of

¹ Political culture theory, although heavily criticized, seemed to fit perfectly at least in one field of study: that of communism. In the mid-1970s, authors interested in explaining the existence of a great diversity within the communist world in spite of institutional uniformity began to use the concept of political culture and highlight the influence of historical and cultural traditions upon these societies. A path-breaking volume, aiming at covering the entire Soviet bloc, was Archie BROWN, Jack GRAY (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Change in Communist States*, Macmillan, London, 1977. This volume had also a sequel, Archie BROWN (ed.), *Political Culture and Communist Studies*, M.E. Sharpe Inc., Armonk, N.Y., 1985. The definition of political culture devised by Archie Brown follows closely that made originally by Gabriel ALMOND and Sydney VERBA in their classic study *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963. According to Brown, political culture represents "the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the foci of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups". See Archie BROWN, Jack GRAY (eds.), *Political Culture...* cit., p. 1. There were, however, scholars within the field of communist studies that employed this concept in such a way as to include not only political attitudes, but also patterns of behavior. See in this respect the studies of Robert C. TUCKER, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1987, or the earlier Stephen WHITE, *Political Culture and Soviet Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1979. For Tucker, political culture refers to "both accepted modes of thought and belief and accepted patterns of conduct". See Robert C. TUCKER, *Political Culture and Leadership...* cit., p. VII. It is this definition that it is employed in my study.

scholars contributed to the reconstruction of Romania's communist past¹. Moreover, the monographs dedicated to this period are dealing almost exclusively with the early stages of the communist dictatorship², although for understanding the post-communist period, the last decade before 1989, dominated by deep shortcomings and daily compromises, would be of greater interest. This professional preference derives from a prevalent view among Romanian historians, according to whom no proper historical work could be produced without archival documents, the very hallmark of the discipline³. Consequently, many of them consider that the writing of a history of communism should be postponed until the archives will be entirely accessible and students of this period will be able to cover all the existing black spots by thorough research.

If one attempts at "catching up" with developments in western historical writing, where documents had long lost the central place among primary sources, then nothing should stop a new, emerging generation of scholars to produce its own scholarship on the communist period, which would be later debated, contradicted, and reassessed by forthcoming generations. Although archives covering the last fifteen years of communism are still closed, there are nevertheless invaluable sources for this period represented by the consistent body of post-communist publications that could be subscribed under the title of personal accounts, such as memoirs, diaries, interviews, and various other testimonies. Moreover, if one follows the current interdisciplinary trend, and tries to "borrow" from a neighboring field such political science, then political culture theory would be a type of approach to which historical knowledge is crucial. In this respect, from among the elements of political (sub)cultures in communist societies, the ones easier to assess are those of related to the elite. In spite of the fact that transcripts of party meetings are still locked in archives, other authoritative texts, such as official speeches, resolutions of Central Committees, and newspapers, are available to anyone interested. Besides, critical texts produced under communism represent an extremely important source for such a study. In short, the fact that the important documents are not yet available should not hamper historians to interpret episodes from the recent past, all the more that, as some pointed out, in most of the cases, the opening of the archives did not disclose anything else but small details.

¹ From among the most influential writings that cover the communist period, partially or entirely, one can mention Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, transl. into Romanian as *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2005; Stelian TĂNASE, *Elite și societate: Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, 1948-1965*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998; Dennis DELETANT, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*, Hurst & Company, London, 1995, transl. into Romanian as *Ceaușescu și Securitatea*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998; IDEM, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State, 1948-1965*, St. Martin's Press, London, 1999, transl. into Romanian as *Teroarea comunistă în România: Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948-1965*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2001.

² See, for instance, Dinu C. GIURESCU, *Guvernarea Nicolae Rădescu*, Editura All, București, 1996; or Florin CONSTANTINIU, *P.C.R., Pătrășcanu și Transilvania, 1945-1946*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2001. From among the new generation of historians, see Florin ȘPERLEA, *De la armata regală la armata populară: Sovietizarea armatei române, 1948-1955*, Editura Ziua, București, 2003.

³ Of the numerous collections of documents concentrating solely on the communist period in Romania one can mention the year-by-year series of volumes launched by the National Archives: Ioan SCURTU (ed.), *1945 – România: Viața politică în documente*, Arhivele Statului din România, București, 1994; IDEM, *1946 – România: Viața politică în documente*, Arhivele Statului din România, București, 1996; IDEM, *1947 – România: Viața politică în documente*, Arhivele Statului din România, București, 1994.

Given the above, this author attempts at analyzing one of the last episodes in the history of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), that of the revolt of party veterans against the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. On 10 March 1989, BBC broadcast an open letter addressed to the Secretary General of the RCP by six former senior party officials. The signatories, in the order mentioned in the end of the text, were: Gheorghe Apostol, Alexandru Bârlădeanu, Corneliu Mănescu, Constantin Pârăvulescu, Grigore Ion Răceanu, and Silviu Brucan¹. All of them were communists since the underground years and rose to prominence under the Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej to be then marginalized from political life by his successor. (Răceanu was the sole exception. He was expelled from the RCP in 1958, after being involved in the so-called "purge of the RCP old-timers".) It was for the first time when a faction of the communist elite, however small and alienated from the inner circle of power, dared to express publicly its criticism against the supreme leader. Thus, this event attracted much interest – mostly abroad – when occurred. However, it was quickly forgotten under the avalanche of events all across the Soviet bloc. Nevertheless, the episode is worth remembering because it illustrates the enduring nature of certain elements of the elite political culture. As Kenneth Jowitt observed, this type of political (sub)culture is defined by the "identity forming experiences" of the communist elite, or, in other words, those patterns of thought and action that emerged in response to such past experiences². Consequently, the present study begins with an introductory part that reviews the monolithic tradition within the RCP. It continues by analyzing the conditions in which that protest emerged, the reaction of the regime when confronted with an unprecedented gesture, its impact on the Romanian population as well as abroad and, finally, its legacies in the post-communist period.

Identity Forming Experiences of the Romanian Communist Elite

Many students of communism acknowledged that a necessary, although not sufficient, step towards change in communist regimes was the emergence of a re-

¹ Extracts from the so-called "letter of the six" were first broadcast by BBC on 10 March 1989. The full text was broadcast by the Munich studio of the Radio Free Europe on 11 March 1989. In the following days, other important western news agencies and newspapers, regardless of political orientation, published the letter and articles commenting it. In France, for instance, on 13 March 1989, two newspapers of divergent orientations, *Libération* and *Le Monde*, published it. For the text of the "letter of the six," see OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six.

² Political culture in a communist society, as in any other society, must not be considered homogenous at national level. Indeed different under communism was the high polarization of society that, in fact, simplified the typology of the cultures (called sometimes subcultures) within such a unit of analysis. Although different authors used various distinctions, these nevertheless overlap in the attempt to emphasize the dichotomy party-state vs. community. Kenneth Jowitt, in an article of 1974, argued that one should distinguish between elite political culture, which was shaped by the "identity-forming experiences" of its members, and the regime political culture, that refers to the responses to the "institutional definition of political, social and economic life". Both should be distinguished from the community political culture, which emerged in response to the "historical relationship between the regime and the community". See his article, "An Organizational Approach to the Study of Political Culture in Marxist-Leninist Systems," republished under the title "Political Culture in Leninist Regimes", in Ken JOWITT, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, pp. 50-87.

form-oriented wing within the communist party. Such developments occurred across the Soviet bloc after Stalin's death, once his successor, Nikita Khrushchev launched the so-called de-Stalinization. A precondition for the development of such a faction was the existence of a strong autochthonous revisionist current among party-affiliated intellectuals, who pushed for reforms, influencing the like-minded officials at the top¹. In Romania, no such liberally minded faction of the party able to propose reforms for within ever emerged. Similarly, Marxist revisionism was barely debated in intellectual circles. Before the communist takeover, Marxist intellectuals were rather rare birds in Romania. Marx and Engels, not to speak about Lenin, were never taken seriously by the large majority of the Romanian interwar intellectuals. Thus, very few of them were attracted to the communist movement, which remained a tiny political group up to the end of the Second World War. After the communist takeover, although the opportunists who jumped in the winning political boat were not in small numbers, very few of the party's newly affiliated intellectuals came to really study Marxism. For the large majority of them, as for most of the party elite, Marx, Engels or Lenin were just browsed to pick up relevant citations, which could have been used either to justify their own perspectives, or as simple banners, useful for displaying obedience to the regime. Implicitly, a revisionist current could not emerge from amidst intellectuals that did not even come to understand the orthodoxy of the doctrine².

As for the party officials, throughout the entire communist period, the Marxist-Leninist thinking was perceived under the primitive form of Stalinism, and no real ideological debates ever took place within the framework of the relevant party institutions³. In fact, ever since the aborted effort of Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi to launch a de-Stalinization in 1956, any attempt to depart from the Stalinist dogma was punished with marginalization from political life. Between the early 1950s, when Gheorghiu-Dej was still struggling to remove his main opponents, and the early 1970s, when Nicolae Ceaușescu succeeded in consolidating his position as uncontested leader, the RCP elite suffered a tremendous transformation. At the end of this process, all that remained from the party leadership was a bunch of trembling *apparatchiks*, incapable and unwilling to

¹ See in this respect the path-breaking study of the Polish-born Marxist philosopher, Leszek KOLAKOWSKI, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 3, *The Breakdown*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, pp. 450-530.

² The causes that hampered the emergence of Marxist revisionism in Romania are analyzed in Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, "From Arrogance to Irrelevance: Avatars of Marxism in Romania", in Raymond TARAS (ed.), *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Postcommunism in Eastern Europe*, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, N.Y., 1992, pp. 135-150.

³ As some of the former members of the *nomenklatura* observed, decisions concentrated from the very beginning in the hand of the very few around the party leader, a circle that became even smaller than that of the members of the Politburo. The Central Committee was a purely decorative institution and no real debate ever took place during its meetings. See Sorin TOMA, "Open Letter to the Radio Free Europe", OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 9, File Dissidents: Sorin Toma. The Radio Free Europe broadcast large extracts from this letter in July-August 1989. This letter was extremely revealing aside the "letter of the six". It was, however, wrongly filed in the archives, under the title dissidents, since its author Sorin Toma was a communist from the underground, who became editor-in-chief of the party daily *Scântea* in 1947, and a member of the Central Committee in 1949. He was, nevertheless, marginalized after 1960 by Gheorghiu-Dej. Investigated by the Party Control Committee, he was expelled from the party in 1963 and worked as editor at a publishing house in Bucharest, Editura Științifică, later on Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, until his retirement in 1975. In 1988, Toma emigrated in Israel with his family and was the most important former party official who came to live abroad.

oppose the decisions of the supreme leader¹. In short, the RCP, by far the least divided in the whole region, never experienced a Hungarian Revolution or a Prague Spring; in other words, convulsions occurred neither within party ranks nor at societal level. Even after the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev, who explicitly encouraged reformists in the satellite countries to follow the example of the Soviet Union, the RCP continued to be a monolithic party whose elite did not dare to question the line imposed by the supreme leader.

Given the weak tradition of revisionism and the hitherto party monolithism, the open letter addressed to Nicolae Ceaușescu by six former members of the *nomenklatura* came as a shock for the *conducător*, who continued to be confident in the rightness of his policy. It was for the first time since the end of the power struggle period that a faction of the RCP dared to challenge the position of the supreme leader. As keen observers of Romanian communism argue, what made the Romanian communist elite behave so coherently during more than four decades in power was exactly the fear of factionalism². Moreover, in the interviews with former *nomenklatura* members, which were published after 1989, all these former officials point to the fear of factionalism within the party as to an essential and distinctive element in the political culture of Romanian communism. To quote only from the views of the signatories, Gheorghe Apostol declared: "I have made myself a myth from the unity of the party", while, in a similar vein, Alexandru Bârlădeanu stated: "We feared factionalism more than leprosy"³. Moreover, the last presidential secretary of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Siviu Curticeanu, recalls in his memoirs that Ceaușescu, himself an old-timer – although not as important as he claimed – was afraid, up to his downfall, not of a popular revolt, but of a coup initiated from within the party⁴. All these testimonies illustrate that the fear to be punished for the mortal sin of "factionalism" remained unaltered even after the party expressed its right to autonomy, becoming an enduring feature of its political culture.

Two early experiences convinced the old-timers that factionalism had to be avoided at all costs. The first was represented by the so-called factionalist struggles of 1928-1929, in which Moscow interfered taking sides, changing the supreme leader of the underground RCP and punishing those involved, many times by execution⁵. The second was the 1946 brutal killing of Ștefan Foriș, the Moscow-appointed leader of the tiny underground section of the party during the war years. The decision to eliminate him is still a matter of controversy. Besides this group,

¹ For a perceptive characterization of the transformation underwent by the Romanian party elite from the time of Gheorghiu-Dej to that of Ceaușescu, see Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *Fantoma lui Gheorghiu-Dej*, Editura Univers, București, 1995.

² Michael Shafir proposes the concept of "faction-anxiety" in order to explain that the cohesion of the generation of old-timers, which occupied then key positions within the party leadership, was ensured not by their ethnic, social or educational homogeneity, but by their particular life experience. Michael SHAFIR, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society*, Frances Pinter Publishers, London, 1985, pp. 65-84.

³ For the personal testimonies of some of these old timers, including two signatories of the letter of six, see Lavinia BETEA, *Maurer și lumea de ieri: Mărturii despre stalinizarea României*, Editura Ioan Slavici, Arad, 1995, p. 275 and Lavinia BETEA, *Alexandru Bârlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu: Convorbiri*, Editura Evenimentul Românesc, București, 1998, p. 305.

⁴ Siviu CURTICEANU, *Mărturia unei istorii trăite: Imagini suprapuse*, Editura Albatros, București, 2000, pp. 322, 363.

⁵ For more on this, see Ghiță, IONESCU, *Communism in Romania: 1944-1962*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964, translated into Romanian as *Comunismul în România*, Editura Litera, București 1994, esp. pp. 25-53 (page citations are to the Romanian translation).

two others, more powerful, existed during the war: the monolithic group that spent many years together in prisons, led by Gheorghiu-Dej, and the Muscovite group, which returned from the Soviet Union with the Red Army and had in Ana Pauker its most prominent personality¹. It was the former group that contested Foriș and accused him of betrayal, however, but the decision to eliminate him was most likely taken by both rival factions². In other words, both Gheorghiu-Dej and Ana Pauker were responsible, the latter at least for tacit approval if not for direct involvement³.

With regard to these two traumatic experiences, it must be underlined that a difference between them existed. The first case meant that the center might come and change at any moment the faction that was incapable to maintain order within the party. This must be understood as a heritage of the period of complete dependence of Moscow, with which the factionalist struggles were associated. Moreover, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, besides showing what the fury of a popular uprising really meant, inculcated the idea that, as long as the local elite depended on the Soviet Union, conflicts at the top would always determine the Soviets to intervene. As Gheorghiu-Dej asserted, the lesson of the "events in Hungary" was that the ideological unity of the party must be defended at all costs⁴. As the revolution in the neighboring country had taught the Romanian leadership, any split at the top caused by the emergence of a reformist faction would provoke revolt at all levels. Such unfortunate political development would inevitably led to Moscow's intervention in favor of the team that had proved to be more loyal and more capable of controlling the population⁵. It was this way of seeing the relation with the (Moscow) center that made Gheorghiu-Dej so anxious to convince Khrushchev to remove the

¹ The theory of the three centers struggling for power was developed in Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *Stalinism for All Seasons ... cit.*, pp. 95-104.

² For more on the power struggle between the underground faction of Foriș and the prison faction of Gheorghiu-Dej during the war years, including an analysis of their exchange of letters, see Pavel CÂMPEANU, *Ceașescu: anii numărătorii inverse*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2002, pp. 106-138. Documents of the pre-communist secret police, *Siguranța*, regarding the activity of Foriș in the underground, as well as interrogations by the Party Control Committee related to the rehabilitation of Foriș by Ceaușescu in 1968, are to be found in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Ioan CHIPER (eds.), *Cazul Ștefan Foriș: Lupta pentru putere în P.C.R. de la Gheorghiu-Dej la Ceaușescu*, Editura Vremea, București, 1999.

³ For the involvement of Ana Pauker in the elimination of Foriș, see Robert LEVY, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002, pp. 70-71, and 281.

⁴ In a speech delivered on 16 December 1956, at the Party Conference of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, Gheorghiu-Dej mentioned that there were two lessons to be learnt from what happened in the neighboring country. The first was "to fight for the defense of party's ideological unity, for its unity of will and action... Any deviation from party discipline must be categorically repelled". The second lesson mentioned by the First Secretary was that the needs of masses must be taken into account. As the subsequent evolution of the party had shown, it seems that Ceaușescu had learnt well the first lesson, but, at least after 1968, forgot the second. See Gheorghe GHEORGHIU-DEJ, *Articole și cuvântări, 1955-1959*, Editura Politică, București, 1960, p. 201.

⁵ In this respect, Ceaușescu, who in 1956 played an important role in implementing the measures taken to avoid a similar outburst in Romania, internalized completely this lesson. Not long after succeeding Gheorghiu-Dej, in 1966, at the anniversary of 45 years since the establishment of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceaușescu made explicit that party members were not allowed to have any direct relationship with Moscow: "It is inadmissible, under any form, that a party member establish relations with a representative of another party over the head of the leadership". See also Mark ALMOND, *The Rise and Fall of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu*, Chapman Publishers, London, 1992, p. 215.

Soviet Army from Romania, seizing, as the Hungarian revolutionaries did, the opportunity of the 1955 withdrawal from Austria to put forward this request.

The second episode, that of the ouster of Ștefan Foriș in 1946, from the initiative of the local communists, explains why this fear of factionalism survived even after the independence from the Soviet Union was internationally asserted. In this case, the main cause was rather internal and had less to do with interferences from Moscow. In short, from the defeat of the Foriș underground faction, the generation of old timers learned that the punishment for factionalism can be applied by the local leadership as well. Factionalism meant "a metal bar in the head", as sociologist Pavel Câmpeanu, himself member of the party since the underground period, put it¹.

Besides these two early formative experiences, the struggle for power in the early 1950s also left an enduring legacy in the political culture of the Romanian communist elite². As known, three main episodes marked this period: the purge of Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca and Teohari Georgescu in 1952, the trial and execution of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu in 1954, and the removal of Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi in 1957. If the first two represented steps in the elimination of important rivals from outside Gheorghiu-Dej's group of prisons, the third purge had a special significance. Pavel Câmpeanu, himself a marginal member of the prison group, who observed that this faction functioned really monolithically after the takeover of power, occupying all the key positions, except Finances and Foreign Affairs, where Vasile Luca and Ana Pauker respectively were in charge until 1952. Not only the above-mentioned episode of the Foriș affair, but also the purge of Pătrășcanu and that of Pauker and Luca, represented natural removals of intruders. The 1956 attempt by Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi to challenge Gheorghiu-Dej's authority was the first conflict within the hitherto monolithic faction of old-timers that socialized together for many years in the adverse environment of jails, mainly in Caransebeș. Consequently, their ousting in 1957 represented a more serious warning for all those who would ever think to criticize and, implicitly, challenge the position of the supreme leader³.

In addition, the 1958 Central Committee Plenum, which dismissed from positions a considerable number of old-timers with less important positions in the party hierarchy, including one of the future signatories of the "letter of the six" Grigore Răceanu, left on its turn another enduring legacy. That Plenum was, in fact, directed against party members who had critically discussed the current situation outside the framework of the party meetings. Thus, its resolution called all party members to be vigilant and repress the manifestation of any such forms of factionalism⁴. After the 1958 Plenum and the round of party verifications that followed it in 1959-60, no criticism was ever heard within the party meetings until Pârvulescu's singular speech at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1979. In conclusion, the "letter of the six" as compared to developments in the Central European

¹ See Pavel CÂMPEANU, *Ceaușescu...cit.*, p. 105.

² For a very detailed account of the power struggles of 1948-1958, beginning with the removal of Pătrășcanu, see Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *Stalinism for All Seasons...cit.*, pp. 110-135.

³ See Pavel CÂMPEANU, *Ceaușescu...cit.*, pp. 43, 59.

⁴ Any private critical discussion was denounced as being a form of factionalism (*discuții fracționiste și fără de principii*). In short, criticism was supposed to be made only in front of the party leadership, not behind its back. For more on this Plenum see Alina TUDOR, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (eds.), *Amurgul ilegalistilor: Plenara PMR din 9-13 iunie 1958*, Editura Vremea, București, 2000.

countries, where communism was practically collapsing at the time when the letter was released, was obsolete. Its high time, that of Marxist revisionism, which developed in Central Europe once de-Stalinization was launched by Khrushchev, had long gone. It ended with the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, when the hopes for changes from within the party, carried out by reform-minded communists, were blown away by the Brezhnev doctrine¹. Nevertheless, taking into account the monolithism that dominated for years the political culture of the Romanian communist elite, the "letter of the six" was the first collective protest since 1956. It did not, however, represent a reformist wing of the party; it did not even represent a coherent group, as it will be further shown.

The Six Veterans: Where They A Group?

As mentioned, all six signatories were former old-timers, who had been through the above-mentioned traumatic experiences and, what is more, all came to be removed from their positions and left outside the *nomenklatura* circle. By far the most important was Gheorghe Apostol (b. 1913), Gheorghiu-Dej's closest and most docile collaborator. They knew each other from the time when both were workers in Galați, and, at some point, it was believed that he would succeed Gheorghiu-Dej to party leadership. Apostol had joined the communist movement in the 1930, and, between 1937 and 1944, spent most of the time deprived of liberty, being part of the team around Gheorghiu-Dej that socialized together in the Caransebeș prison. After the RCP conference in 1945, Apostol became member of the Central Committee, and was in charge with the trade unions. After the merge of the communists with the breakaway socialists in February 1948, he was raised to the position of the member of the Politburo of the newly established Romanian Workers' Party (RWP). After the purge of Pauker, Luca and Georgescu, Apostol was part of the party commission that investigated Ana Pauker in 1953-1954 and 1956. As a sign of Gheorghiu-Dej's total confidence in him, in April 1954, when, under the influence of the new trend in Moscow, the former wanted to simulate that a collective leadership was established in Romania, it was Apostol who was appointed First Secretary of the RWP. (With that occasion, the title of Secretary General was changed, also following the fashion in the Soviet Union.) During a short while, Gheorghiu-Dej retained for himself just the office of President of the Council of Ministers, but, in October 1954, he rapidly corrected the error of renouncing to the control of the party apparatus, taking over both prerogatives once again². Apostol, however, remained his trustworthy person.

In 1965, at Gheorghiu-Dej's death, Apostol was considered by many outsiders as the successor, given the close relationship with the late supreme leader. How-

¹ A very good collection of documents regarding the Prague Spring, accompanied by a detailed narrative of events, is to be found in Jaromir NAVRATIL et al. (eds.), *The Prague Spring 1968: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 1998.

² After this short stay in the party top position, Apostol, who had been between 1952 and 1954 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Agriculture, returned to trade unions as President of the Central Council of Trade Unions. In 1961, he was appointed First Deputy Prime-Minister, an office he held until 1967, two years after Gheorghiu-Dej's death, when once again he came back to trade unions as Chairman of the General Confederation.

ever, it was Ceaușescu who was proposed for the supreme position by Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Politburo member and President of the Council of Ministers at the time, and then accepted by the rest of the Politburo members¹. In August 1969, at the Tenth Party Congress, Apostol was not reelected in the Politburo, which since the Ninth Congress in 1965 was redefined as the Standing Presidium. Consequently, he sent an angry letter to the party central newspaper *Scântea* in which he severely criticized Ceaușescu for erasing the merits of his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, to the level of failing to mention his name in any public discourse. Obviously, Apostol's letter was never published². After holding the position of Director General of the General Directorate of State Reserves from 1969 until March 1975, he was appointed in a position completely outside party hierarchy, in a Bucharest enterprise. However, between May 1977 and August 1988, Apostol was sent as Ambassador in several Latin American countries³. From that time on, Apostol regularly met his colleague of generation, the Bessarabian born Alexandru Bârlădeanu, to discuss "what is to be done" in the given conditions of crisis. The two former senior officials were the original nucleus from which the "letter of the six" was born.

A law graduate from the University of Iași, Alexandru Bârlădeanu (b. 1911) entered the communist movement in 1936, while still a student. Unlike in Bucharest, in the city of Iași, the leftist currents were considerable stronger, especially among university students. After graduation, he became assistant professor at the Faculty of Law, Department of Economics, of the University of Iași. In 1940, Bârlădeanu moved to the Soviet occupied Bessarabia, where he was with the Institute of Scientific Research in Kishinev. When the Romanian army reoccupied this region in 1941, Bârlădeanu moved further to the Soviet Union and worked at the Plechanov Institute for Planing in Moscow. After the war, as other refugees, he returned to Romania. In 1946, Bârlădeanu became Secretary General in the Minister of National Economy, in 1948 Minister of Foreign Trade, and, from 1953 to 1955, he was Vice Chair-

¹ By corroborating the conflicting stories of Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Apostol with those of other, more distant, witnesses, as Bârlădeanu, one can grasp Ceaușescu's backstage maneuvers that assured him the support of a majority of the Politburo. The available testimonies indicate that, although Ceaușescu rose in the party hierarchy in the aftermath of the purges in the 1950s and gained Gheorghiu-Dej's confidence after being instrumental in ousting Constantinescu and Chișinevschi, he might not have been chosen for the supreme position by his predecessor. Bârlădeanu remembered that, by 1965, Gheorghiu-Dej was already annoyed by Ceaușescu's dogmatism, especially with regard to the latter's abuses in agriculture. This testimony must be, however, taken with caution because of Bârlădeanu's resentful attitude towards Ceaușescu for his 1967 removal. See Lavinia BETEA, *Bârlădeanu...cit.*, pp. 177-184. Maurer was, in any case, the key player in supporting Ceaușescu's candidacy. He, nevertheless, recognized that Gheorghiu-Dej, on his deathbed, told him to propose Apostol as the successor in front of the Politburo election meeting. At the same time, Maurer claimed that he decided to support Ceaușescu for two reasons. First, to avoid a split at the top and, second, because he considered him pugnacious enough as to continue the "national" line initiated by Gheorghiu-Dej. For Apostol's account concerning Ceaușescu's maneuvers to become Gheorghiu-Dej's successor, see Lavinia BETEA, *Maurer... cit.*, pp. 272-275. For Maurer's testimony, see *ibidem*, pp. 172-177. Paul Niculescu-Mizil, another distant observer, tries to offer a more balanced view on the episode of Ceaușescu's election. See Paul NICULESCU-MIZIL, *O istorie trăită*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 1997, pp. 378-391.

² A copy of this document is in the possession of this author.

³ In May 1977, he was sent Ambassador in Argentina. From August 1981, Apostol also held the position of non-resident Ambassador to Uruguay. His last diplomatic appointment was Ambassador to Brazil since September 1983. From 1988, he was finally forced to retire and returned to Bucharest.

man of the State Planning Committee. In 1955 he was appointed Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers in charge with economic issues, and Romania's permanent representative in the COMECON, positions which he held until 1966.

Only a year later, in 1956, he entered the party apparatus, being elected member of the Central Committee. In 1963, he became an alternate member of the Politburo, and from 1965 until 1968 full member of the Presidium of the CC's Political Executive Committee. In fact, it was in his capacity as representative in the COMECON, that Bârlădeanu rose to prominence, gaining international recognition for expressing openly during the meeting of 15 February 1963 that Romania, although willing to collaborate within this economic organ, would not do this the terms dictated by Moscow¹. At the time, he was credited as being a sort of Romanian Ota Sik², in other words a proponent of limited reforms meant to regenerate the centrally planned economy by introducing some free market elements. Indeed, he was the main artisan of the plan for economic reforms formulated in 1967, which was drawn, as he claimed after 1989, along the lines which Gheorghiu-Dej, had it not been for his death, would have intended to pursue. It seems, according to Bârlădeanu, Apostol and Maurer that Gheorghiu-Dej, once society was under control, seemed to have favored a Kadarist economic policy³. On the contrary, Ceaușescu was never able to revisit the economic development plans sketched at the time when at stake was to secure some distance from Moscow. This is perhaps the reason for which Ceaușescu adamantly opposed Bârlădeanu's economic strategy of 1967 and, in order to continue the same economic policy based on disproportionate investments in industry, along the lines established in the early 1960s, pushed him to retire. In January 1969, he lost his position of Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers⁴, and at the Tenth Party Congress he was not reelected as a member of the Central Committee.

Aside Bârlădeanu, the most internationally known from all the signatories was Corneliu Mănescu, Romania's former representative at the United Nations and the

¹ For Bârlădeanu's personal account on his opposition to Khrushchev's plans to assign to each satellite country what economic branches should develop, manifested during a 1963 meeting of the COMECON Executive Committee, see Lavinia BETEA, *Bârlădeanu...* cit., pp. 150-151. For a detailed account of Romania's anti-Moscow position in the COMECON in the early 1960s, see also David FLOYD, *Rumania: Russia's Dissident Ally*, Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, New York, 1965, pp. 71-82.

² Ota Sik was one of the key proponents of economic reforms prior to and during the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. For more about debates regarding the introduction of market mechanisms to revive the socialist centrally-planned economies, see François FEJTŐ, *A History of the People's Democracies: Eastern Europe Since Stalin*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1971, pp. 249-266.

³ According to the testimonies left by them, Gheorghiu-Dej was determined to relax domestic policy after he had succeeded in securing for Romania an independent position in military, economic and even political terms within the communist camp. Bârlădeanu claims that Gheorghiu-Dej intended to grant autonomy to collective farms, allowing them to function according to the free market mechanism. See Lavinia BETEA, *Bârlădeanu...* cit., pp. 112, 156. Apostol goes as far as to argue that, after succeeded in gaining independence from Moscow, Gheorghiu-Dej intended to head Romania towards both economic and political liberalization, while Maurer stated that it was Gheorghiu-Dej's death that stopped the trend towards economic reforms. See Lavinia BETEA, *Maurer...* cit., pp. 151-152, and 265.

⁴ Between 1965 and 1967, he was even Prime Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers, aside Apostol and Emil Bodnăraș. Between 1967 and 1969, Bârlădeanu remained Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers (at the time, there was only one Prime Vice Chairman, the rising star, Ilie Verdet). In 1966, Bârlădeanu lost his position as Romania's representative to COMECON. In exchange, he was appointed Chairman of the National Council for Scientific Research.

longest-surviving communist Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mănescu (b. 1916), who had a genuine working-class background, came from a family of communist militants from the most industrialized region of interwar Romania, the Prahova Valley, where leftist traditions had stronger roots than in the overwhelmingly agrarian parts. In 1936, while a student in law in Bucharest, he joined the communist youth movement – which was at the time an illegal organization – not only because of family traditions, but also from anti-fascist convictions, as he declared¹. During the war, he worked at the Institute of Statistics, which was known for his leftist but non-communist staff, including reputed scholars such as Anton Golopenția, who ended his life in communist prisons, or Sabin Manuilă, who managed to flee to the West after 1945. As an employee of that institute, Mănescu was involved in the census made in Transnistria in 1941, after this region came under Romanian administration as a result of the advancement of the Eastern front beyond the pre-1940 borders of Greater Romania. Mănescu also participated in the 23 August coup, fighting in the communist organized patriotic guards. He was, nevertheless, purged in 1948, after the first verification of party members. Moreover, it seems, as recently released files of the Pătrășcanu trial show, that Mănescu was almost to be involved in this purge. His participation in the Transnistria census, aside other leftist intellectuals close to Pătrășcanu, could have been easily interpreted as a manifestation of a Romanian-type of imperialism, which were condemned by the Comintern theses of the 1931 Fifth Congress of the RCP². In any case, until the late 1950s, he held minor positions in the military.

Only in 1960 Mănescu started his long diplomatic career as director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then as Ambassador to Hungary. A year later, in 1961, quite unexpectedly, Gheorghiu-Dej appointed him Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is interesting to note that the Secretary General included Mănescu among the key persons in the inner circle of power exactly at a moment when he was planning to launch his plan of rapprochement with the West³. With the same occasion, Mănescu became the head of the Romanian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, and, in this capacity, in 1967, he was elected chairman of the twenty-second session of the UN. From his office in the diplomatic apparatus, he participated in all the last crucial stages towards the affirmation of independence from the Soviet Union. Although Mănescu owed his career to Gheorghiu-Dej, he was maintained in position until 23 October 1972, longer than any member of the elite raised by Ceaușescu's predecessor, except for Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Emil Bodnăraș, the two who were instrumental in arranging the succession. Thus, it can be said that he assured the continuity in external policy at the beginning of the new

¹ Lavinia BETEA, *Convorbiri ne terminate: Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 32.

² See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit, p. 49-55.

³ According to Gheorghiu-Dej's secretary, Paul Sfetcu, George Macovescu was Mănescu's unsuccessful counter-candidate to the position of Foreign Minister in 1961. Mănescu's appointment was surprising, considering that Macovescu, beginning as chargé d'affaires to the Romanian legation in London immediately after the communist takeover, and up to the position of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, which he held in 1961, had a much longer career, and implicitly experience, in diplomacy. See Paul SFETCU, *13 ani în anticamera lui Dej*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 2000, pp. 205-207. For an account on Macovescu's early career as diplomat in London, see Egon BALAS, *The Will to Freedom: A Perilous Journey Through Fascism and Communism*, University of Syracuse Press, Syracuse, 2000. In 1972, it was George Macovescu who replaced Mănescu as Minister of Foreign Affairs; in 1978, he was on his turn replaced by Ștefan Andrei.

regime, until Ceaușescu succeeded in consolidating his power¹. In fact, Mănescu's career within the party apparatus began only in 1965, when elected member of the Central Committee at the Ninth Party Congress. After his release from the position of the head of the Romanian diplomacy, Mănescu held several rather symbolic offices, until 1977, when sent Ambassador to France². From 1979, he was also Romania's permanent delegate to UNESCO. In 1983, he lost both positions, and in 1984, at the Thirteenth Party Congress, he was not reelected member of the Central Committee, entering a period of complete marginalization.

The only signatory of the letter who, in 1921, was among the founding fathers of the Romanian Communist Party, formed by the socialists who voted for an unconditional affiliation to the Third International, was Constantin Pârvulescu (b. 1895). During the Bolshevik Revolution, he was a volunteer in the Red Army. In 1929, in the aftermath of the factionalist struggles, Pârvulescu became member of the Central Committee. Arrested and imprisoned in 1936, he spent three years in jail before escaping. After a stay in the Soviet Union, Pârvulescu returned to Romania and throughout the war years acted in the underground faction headed by Ștefan Foriș, the party secretary appointed by Moscow in 1940. He sided with Foriș during the above-mentioned dispute with the prison faction, manifested by an exchange of mutually incriminating letters, just to betray him a year latter. In April 1944, aside Emil Bodnăraș and Iosif Rangheț, he was part of the triumvirate that took over the leadership of this faction, ousting Foriș. All three were among the very few underground communists who were also imprisoned, so he had the chance to establish a direct connection with Gheorghiu-Dej. In September 1944, once the Muscovites Ana Pauker and Vasile Luca returned from the Soviet Union, Pârvulescu stepped down from the supreme leadership, which was taken over by the two of them together with Gheorghiu-Dej and Teohari Georgescu.

In 1945, as Chairman of the Party Control Committee, Pârvulescu held a key position in the apparatus, being responsible for the verification of all members³. After the purge of Pauker, Luca, and Georgescu in 1952, he was among those raised at the level of Politburo member to replace the purged ones. However, Pârvulescu would lose this position at the Second Congress of the RWP in 1960, because of his association with the criticism launched by Miron Constantinescu and Iosif Chișinevschi after Khrushchev's Secret Speech in 1956. Nevertheless, unlike the other two – who were purged in 1957 – he was spared a similar fate, presumably because he went to Gheorghiu-Dej and informed him about the intention of the others⁴.

¹ About his replacement, the rumor was that Ceaușescu had become envious on his international success, while Elena was jealous on his wife's beauty. For the really adventurous episode of his replacement, see Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., pp. 216-235.

² In 1969, Mănescu was also appointed member of the Defense Council, position held until 1974. In 1973, he became Vice Chairman of the National Council of the Socialist Unity Front. In 1975, Mănescu was appointed in a symbolic position within the Grand National Assembly, Chairman of the Commission for Foreign Policy and International Economic Cooperation, from which he was replaced in 1977 to be sent Ambassador in France.

³ After the merge of the RCP with the Romanian Social-Democratic Party, in 1948, all party members went to the process of verification at the Party Control Committee. It was during this verification that Mănescu was expelled from the party.

⁴ A copy of this document is in the possession of the author. Pârvulescu's testimony in front of the Party Control Committee about his involvement with Constantinescu and Chișinevschi in 1956, made with the occasion of the rehabilitation of Foriș and Pătrășcanu, is to be found in Dan CĂTĂNUȘ, Ioan CHIPER (eds.), *Cazul Ștefan Foriș...* cit., pp. 309-339.

Although he lost his Politburo and CC seats in 1960, Pârvulescu remained President of the Party Control Committee. Nevertheless, in 1961, at the November-December CC Plenum, during which Gheorghiu-Dej reinterpreted the history of the party purges as a struggle between a local faction, represented by him, and a Muscovite one, which included all those who were ousted, the supreme leader accused him again for his wavering in 1956¹. It was Ceaușescu who raised Pârvulescu again, appointing him Chairman of the CC Central Commission of Revision in 1965. In this capacity, he was directly involved in the rehabilitation campaign of 1968, during which the accusations made against those who had been purged in the 1950s were reexamined. Some were, in the end, cleared, among whom the nationally-oriented leader Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, but others not, such were the "aliens", the Jewish communist Ana Pauker and the Hungarian Vasile Luca (Luka László)². In 1969, Pârvulescu lost the position of Chairman of the Commission of Revision, but, after the Tenth Party Congress, remained among its members. From 1969 to 1974, he was also a member of the National Council of the Socialist Unity Front. His most glorious moment was at the Twelfth Party Congress, in November 1979. Although was not on the approved list of speakers, Pârvulescu stood up and asked to be allowed to express his opinions, in the middle of a live TV broadcast. Ceaușescu made the error to let him speak, and, thus, for the first time in the history of the Romanian Communist Party since the turbulence that followed the Khrushchev's Secret Speech, an open criticism of the supreme leader was heard during a party meeting. If in 1956, when together with Constantinescu and Chișinevschi, Pârvulescu raised his voice in accusing the leader of that time, Gheorghiu-Dej, the criticism was more or less oblique, in 1979 it was direct. In short, he denounced Ceaușescu for putting his personal interests above those of the party. Another difference between the two moments was that, in 1979, Pârvulescu was alone and isolated from most of the elite members, all *apparatchiks* who owed their career to Ceaușescu and not to personal merits. For them, Pârvulescu was a hopeless old man, unable to understand that the power relations had changed.

Like Pârvulescu, Grigore Răceanu had also joined the communist movement well before coming to power. Unlike most of the communists, he was not imprisoned, thus he was implicitly part of the underground faction led by Ștefan Foriș. According to a short biography made by his step son, Mircea, Grigore Răceanu was one of the initiators of a huge workers' manifestation held in Brașov on 1 September 1940 against the Second Vienna Award. Moreover, in 1942, he entered in conflict with Foriș because of drafting a memorandum on the problem of Bessarabia and the Bukovina, the territories occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940³. As a consequence, he was excluded from the party in 1942, but reintegrated in 1944. After the communist takeover, Răceanu held various positions in the party apparatus, but never at the highest levels.

Among the six, he was the only one who was marginalized by Gheorghiu-Dej. Aside sixteen other old-timers, Răceanu was severely criticized at the Central

¹ See the transcript of the CC Plenum of November-December 1961. A copy of this document is in the possession of the author.

² For the documents issued by the special commission of investigation for the rehabilitation of the communist victims, see Gheorghe BUZATU, Mircea CHIRIȚOIU (eds.), *Agresiunea comunismului în România: Documente din arhivele secrete, 1944-1989*, Editura Paideia, București, 1998.

³ Mircea RĂCEANU, *Infern 89: Povestea unui condamnat la moarte*, Editura Silex, București, 2000, pp. 27-29.

Committee Plenum of 9-13 June 1958 for "anti-party manifestations". All the accused party members had allegedly formed a factionalist group, which held "unprincipled and factionalist debates". In translation from the communist wooden language this syntagm meant critical discussions on the party policy held in private circles, that is, outside the official framework of party meetings¹. Following Khrushchev's Secret Speech and the Hungarian Revolution, the Romanian leadership, by then completely controlled by Gheorghiu-Dej, wanted to avoid at any costs a genuine split at the top, as shown before. As Apostol reiterated in his concluding speech to the 1958 Plenum, "the existence of party factions is incompatible with the organizational and ideological principles of our party, thus, it cannot be tolerated"². However, it must be stressed that, unlike Constantinescu and Chişinevschi, who in 1956 did try to undermine the authority of the supreme leader and could have been labeled as a "factionalist group", this time the accused persons were no group at all. Although all were veterans of the party, some of them did not even know each other, not to speak about a common critical position. Moreover, all of them, including Răceanu, unlike those purged in 1952 and 1957, were in inferior positions in the party hierarchy. Thus, the 1958 Plenum must not be taken as a last step in the struggle for power, as some authors assumed, but just a stick destined to frighten the entire apparatus in order to maintain a monolithic party³.

At that plenum, two signatories of the "letter of the six" were among Răceanu's accusers: Apostol, already mentioned, and Pârvulescu, who at the time was the head of the Party Control Committee, which had interrogated Răceanu and had established his guilt. It is also interesting to mention that it was Nicolae Ceauşescu who was entrusted by Gheorghiu-Dej to deliver the main accusation speech⁴. Răceanu's atypical past during the underground years provided Ceauşescu with plenty of material against him. He was accused of trying to reach a deal with Iuliu Maniu on a nationalist and anti-Soviet basis, of sharing the same views as the "traitor" Ştefan Foriş, and of constantly acting for weakening the unity of the party. In 1958, the main accusation was that the alleged "factionalist group" intended to organize a meeting of 200-300 marginalized old-timers, in order to create a split between the veterans and non-veterans, between those who held top positions and those who did not. In this respect, Răceanu's declarations were more than relevant to prove his guilt in the opinion of the RCP leadership: he argued that a Petöfi Circle, on the model of the debate circle which functioned in Hungary between 1955 and 1956⁵, must have been established in Romania as well⁶.

¹ This CC meeting had remained in the party folklore as the Plenum about "vigilance". For more on the real significance of the 1958 Plenum, see Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, *Stalinism for All Seasons...* cit., pp. 165-167.

² Alina TUDOR, Dan CĂTĂNUŞ (eds.), *Amurgul ilegalităţilor...* cit., p. 220.

³ See IDEM, "Introduction" to *Amurgul ilegalităţilor...* cit., pp. 5-11.

⁴ In 1957, Ceauşescu had been instrumental in discovering incriminating evidences for accusing Miron Constantinescu of being a Stalinist, as Bărlădeanu remembers. Although this was an easy task since before Stalin's death all had delivered speeches praising the Soviet leader, Gheorghiu-Dej was impressed by Ceauşescu's ability, and, perhaps thus, asked him to conduct the 1958 campaign against party veterans. See Lavinia BETEA, *Bărlădeanu...* cit., p. 130.

⁵ This was a debate circle founded in Budapest under the aegis of the Communist Union of Democratic Youth. Although in the beginning the meetings were supervised by the Central Committee, after the Twentieth Congress of CPSU, it became freer and the audience grew tremendously. By June 1956, the circle arrived at debating on the abolition of censorship, for instance. For more on intellectual debates encouraged by Khrushchev's Secret Speech, see François FEJTŐ, *A History of the People's Democracies ...* cit., pp. 56-62.

⁶ Alina TUDOR, Dan CĂTĂNUŞ (eds.), *Amurgul ilegalităţilor...* cit., pp. 26-29, 49-50.

Consequently, Răceanu was for the second time deprived of his party membership, together with such a prominent figure among old-timers as Constantin Doncea, former colleague of Gheorghiu-Dej at the Grivița Railway Repair Shop and organizer of the strike of 1933¹. Among the accused persons was also his wife, Ileana Răceanu, who lost her position of alternate member of the Central Committee for having a "conciliatory attitude" regarding the anti-party position of her husband; in other words, for not informing the party leadership about Grigore Răceanu². Although at the Plenum of June 1958, Ceaușescu was the main denouncer, it was also he who silently rehabilitated his former victims at the Plenum of April 1968, together with other casualties made under Gheorghiu-Dej, including Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu. Moreover, under Ceaușescu, Mircea Răceanu, Ileana's son with the underground communist Andrei Bernath, later on adopted by Grigore, could pursue a diplomatic career. However, Mircea would be made part of the letter affair too.

Finally, the last among the signatories of the letter in the order announced by radio and published in newspapers, but the key author and main initiator, as he presented himself later on, was Silviu Brucan (b. 1916). Of Jewish origin, Brucan joined the communist movement before the Second World War. After the coup of 23 August 1944, he became the acting editor of party's central newspaper, *Scântea*, position he held until 1956. In this capacity, in the late 1940s, he wrote almost on a daily basis propaganda articles incriminating the leaders of the other parties of being fascists, according to the communist logic that all those who were anti-communists must have been fascists. Because the Yalta Agreements of 1945 had legalized the purge from political life of those who had been fascists, the communists seized this opportunity to attack all their political opponents. In his articles, Brucan accused democratic politicians, such were the National-Peasantist Iuliu Maniu or the National-Liberal Dinu Brătianu, of having supported fascism, and, consequently, asked to be put to trial and severely condemned³. From 1956 to 1959, Brucan was Romania's Ambassador to Washington, at a time when the relations between the

¹ It seems that Doncea's purge had a special significance. It has been argued that Gheorghiu-Dej was jealous on him and Dumitru Petrescu – both former fellow strike organizers at Grivița – because for them an escape was organized by the Comintern shortly after their arrest, while he remained in prison until the end of the war. However, as Câmpeanu had recently shown, when Doncea and Petrescu escaped, Gheorghiu-Dej could have done it too, but he was too afraid to be shot by the guards and preferred to stay. See Pavel CÂMPEANU, *Ceaușescu...* cit., p. 96. Thus, it seems that the real motive was related to the attempts by Mihail Roller, the director of the History Institute of the Party, to organize an oral archive regarding the Grivița strike of 1933, based on the testimonies of all surviving witnesses. With that occasion, Doncea started to emphasize that his role was much more important than that of Gheorghiu-Dej, challenging the official interpretation. It should be mentioned that Dumitru Petrescu also was expelled for "anti-party activity" during the CC Plenum on 16-17 June 1956, together with three others. In 1958, the accused persons were put in connection with those purged in 1956.

² A veteran of the communist movement, Ileana Răceanu was forced to accuse her husband during that Plenum. However, she did that invoking only personal defects and not deviations from the party line or discipline that could have been used against him. For her position during the Plenum, see Alina TUDOR, Dan CĂTĂNUȘ (eds.), *Amurgul ilegalităților...* cit., pp. 91-102, and for the final decision of the Plenum, which included the accusations and the sentences given to the seventeen people involved, see *ibidem*, pp. 239-242.

³ For excerpts from Brucan's articles, see Șerban RĂDULESCU-ZONER, Daniela BUȘE, Beatrice MARINESCU, *Instaurarea totalitarismului comunist în România*, Editura Cavallioti, București, esp. pp. 207-227.

two countries were minimal. From 1959 until 1962, he was Romania's Ambassador to the United Nations. After that, Brucan was appointed head of the newly established Romanian Television. Since 1966, he taught Marxism at the University of Bucharest, in spite of the fact that he did not have the necessary formal education. During the 1970s and 1980s, Brucan was repeatedly invited as visiting professor of social sciences at universities in the United States, United Kingdom and France. To this author knowledge, he was the only Romanian prominent communist who managed to publish books outside the country under his own name, except for Ceaușescu himself. Between 1971 and 1983, three books by Brucan appeared at American publishing houses, which promoted left-oriented social analyses of communist societies. Brucan's writings did not bring exceptionally fresh insights into the communist societies; one might call them simple compilations. Nevertheless, they represented an insider's voice, which added to the existing chorus of critical voices coming from the region the missing voice coming from Romania¹. However, it was only in the fourth, *World Socialism at the Crossroads*, in which Brucan argued for the necessity to reform the communist system. The source of his inspiration, nevertheless, was not Central European reformism of the 1960s, but Leninism, as this was the new trend in Moscow as well. In 1987, when Brucan's book was published, similar views had already been advocated by Mikhail Gorbachev. In short, in supporting the removal of Stalinist legacy in economy, Brucan's economic model was Lenin's New Economic Policy of the early 1920s. Central planning, which he observed to be no longer compatible with the current stage of industrial development, should have been replaced by allowing the economy be regulated by market mechanisms, instead of political and ideological decisions. Brucan acknowledged, however, that economic reforms must be accompanied by political reforms. In this respect, he envisaged that pluralism could be assured within the framework of the communist party by allowing factions to exist. In his words, "factions must be legalized", which in fact represented a return to the period before democratic centralism was introduced by Stalin in order to suppress any divergent views within the party. As repeatedly noted, the unity of the party represented an obsession of the Romanian communist elite. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that, at that time, and at the level of the RCP elite, Brucan's views were indeed revolutionary. Interestingly enough, however, by 1989, Brucan's views did not evolve, but remained basically the same. It was he who advocated the transformation of the National Salvation Front, the ad-hoc organism created during the

¹ See his books *The Dissolution of Power*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1971; *The Dialectic of World Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1978; and *The Post-Brezhnev Era*, Praeger, New York, 1983. The only original criticism of the Stalinist type of society that came from a Romanian communist belonged to the sociologist Pavel Câmpeanu. His first book, *The Syncretic Society*, was published in 1980 by M.E. Sharpe under a pseudo-name, and, except for the editor himself, Alfred Meyer, nobody knew who was Felipe Garcia Casals. Câmpeanu's main thesis is that in such a society as the Soviet one, where the Socialist Revolution was initiated at a time when capitalism was not sufficiently ripped, the political, social and economic order envisaged by Marx could not have been maintained but by force. In short, Stalinism was not an historical accident caused by the emergence of a particular leader, but a historical necessity. In 1986, Câmpeanu extended his earlier analysis and published it under his own name, explaining also who Casals was. See his *The Origins of Stalinism: From Leninist Revolution to Stalinist Society* M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 1986. For the avatars of these two books and the consequences of their publication upon their author, see Pavel CÂMPEANU, "Povestea unei cărți apărute în Statele Unite", in *Observator Cultural*, no. 103, 12-18 February 2002, pp. 4-6.

revolution, into a political party, in which pluralism must have been assured by the existence of factions¹.

Nevertheless, Brucan's most visible anti-Ceaușescu action was his interview to the UPI reporter, Nick Thorpe, immediately after the Brașov workers' strike in November 1987. He defined that event as a "watershed in Romania's political history as a socialist state", because the stability of the regime, until then based on consent, and not repression, could not have been assured any longer in the same way. The Romanian leadership, he said, must choose between mass repression – because that was not the act of a handful of people but an unprecedented demonstration of thousands of workers, whom the regime pretended to represent – and a genuine effort to deal with the problems faced by the population. The RCP, he said, must take this seriously and initiate changes since the Romania's disastrous situation was the direct result of the foolish measures taken on the idea that crisis must be solved not by reform but by charging every Romanian's bill². Brucan's initiative had indeed a profound impact on some of the other signatories, notably on Apostol, who would contact him later in order to jointly organize a protest letter. In doing this, the latter overlooked that the former had once an inferior position in the party hierarchy.

In fact, it must be stressed that the six were neither part of a reformist wing within the party since they were all removed from their functions, nor a coherent and well-organized group of people, ready to take over power after the fall of Ceaușescu. Moreover, they were no group at all. Some of them never got to know the other signatories, neither during the letter affair, nor after the fall of communism. The six were, in short, veteran communists over 70 years old, unhappy that all what they had once constructed with great efforts – i.e., Romania's independent position in relation with Moscow and its special relations with the West – were ruined by the current party leader³. However, one must give them credit for their courage, considering that all these people were under the supervision of the secret police, with telephones listened and houses bugged, so that they had to meet in parks and on the roofs, or put the radio loud when discussing inside. Unlike others, such as Ion Gheorghe Maurer – the former President of the Council of Ministers until 1974, and the key person responsible for promoting Ceaușescu to power – who preferred to live in retirement a relatively luxurious life in the given conditions, the six were, after all, ready to risk the tranquility of their existence and the privileges they have as compared to the rest of the population⁴.

¹ See Lavinia BETEA, *Bârlădeanu...* cit., p. 236.

² An article by the UPI reporter who interviewed Brucan, Nick Thorpe, was published in *The Independent* on 28 November 1987. See also "Romanian Official Denounces Hardships under Ceaușescu", OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Unit, 300/60/3/Box 6, File Dissidents: Silviu Brucan.

³ Mănescu pointed out that Romania's situation at the end of the 1980s was similar to that of Hungary at the end of the Second World War, when it lost everything because it remained Hitler's last ally. On the contrary, in 1989 Hungary was the "Trojan horse" in the collapse of communism, while Romania remained up to the end the last bastion of Stalinism. Thus, Mănescu bitterly acknowledged, Romania lost everything that was built by him and others who acted at the interface with the West during the 1960s and the 1970s. See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., p. 245.

⁴ Being asked why among them one cannot find such an important person as Maurer, who would have given weight to the letter, some of the signatories replied that he was avoided, because he still seem to have remained very close to Ceaușescu, and completely uninterested in anything else than his well being. See Silviu BRUCAN, *Generația irosită*, Editurile Universul & Calistrat Hogaș, București, 1992, p. 182; Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., pp. 236-237, and Mircea RĂCEANU, *Infern* 89... cit., p. 400.

The Open Letter, Its Impact, and Its "Legacy"

It is very hard to reconstruct the story of the letter, since the testimonies given by five of the signatories after 1989 (the sixth, Pârvulescu, died before having the chance to leave his version) are in many respects contradictory. After the fall of communism, Brucan tried to take most of the credit for the letter on him, even accusing Apostol for betraying all the others during the investigation by the *Securitate*. However, all the others, in the interviews given or the articles written after 1989, acknowledged Apostol's centrality in this affair. It was he who, upon his return from Brasilia in 1988, took the initiative of approaching members of the old guard in order to issue a public protest against Ceaușescu, and, in fact, he recruited all the others¹. Nevertheless, as Apostol confessed, it was Brucan with his post-Brașov public criticism that made him think of a collective letter of protest addressed directly to the Secretary General².

In the spring of 1988, after his release from the diplomatic post, Apostol began his endeavors by contacting potential supporters of a collective protest. Considering the climate of hopelessness and compliance, which dominated the communist elite, the target recruitment group was that of former prominent officials who had been removed by Ceaușescu; in short, people who, beyond a disagreement over political issues, had a personal reason to be against the supreme leader. Consequently, Apostol got in touch one by one with Bârlădeanu, known for his dispute over economic issues with the Secretary General; with Pârvulescu, who had openly criticized Ceaușescu in 1979; and with Mănescu, eliminated apparently without reason from the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1972. Brucan, although never a first rank communist official as the others, was contacted because his declarations after the Brașov strike proved he had adequate channels of transmission to the West, which none of the others had. Finally, in lack of other more prominent persons willing to take the risk of signing a protest letter, Apostol contacted Grigore Răceanu through his son, Mircea, who worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with whom he had formal relations. In short, all signatories were connected either directly or by intermediaries only with Apostol³. In rest, some knew each other from the time when in power, such were Bârlădeanu and Mănescu, but

¹ While Răceanu clearly indicates Apostol as the person who had the idea of the letter, and Mănescu remembers that he was the fourth person directly contacted by him, Bârlădeanu implied that it was a joint initiative, belonging to Apostol and himself. As for Brucan, although he distorted the entire story as to take most of the credit for the letter, he also acknowledged that it was Apostol who approached him with the idea to organize a collective protest of the old guard. See Mircea RĂCEANU, *Infern 89...* cit., p. 399; Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., p. 240; IDEM, *Bârlădeanu...* cit., p. 217; and Silviu BRUCAN, *Generația...* cit., p. 179.

² See Lavinia BETEA, *Maurer...* cit., p. 281.

³ Aside Apostol, it seems that only Mănescu tried on his turn to recruit others, but with no success. As Mănescu mentioned, most of the approached people motivated their refusal either by the fear of tortures or by the fear of losing the privileges, which in fact meant just access to better medical facilities and special food shops. However insignificant these might seem now, in the conditions of deep economic crisis, they were of great importance. Mănescu recalled that he tried to convince Janos Fazekas to put his signature on the letter, but he was refused. However, after the revolution, since the meeting between them was recorded by the *Securitate* although it took place on a roof, Fazekas tried to get some credit from Mănescu's attempt to recruit him. He affirmed that he refrained from joining this collective protest because he wanted to remain in the second row, and defend the others when arrested. Besides, the minority problem, which was of primary interest for him, was not well tackled, Fazekas claimed. See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., pp. 236, 238.

never met during the letter affair. Moreover, a person like Răceanu, who was expelled from the party in 1958, was completely unknown for all the others, perhaps with the exception of a founding father of the party as Pârvulescu was.

After 1989, Brucan pretended that he was the key person in the letter affair, and, in trying to accredit this idea, he minimized the role of Apostol, the initiator, by accusing him of betrayal during the secret police investigations. His hypothesis is supported by the very fact that Apostol was the one who suffered the least after the release of the letter. Brucan's visibility after 1989 allowed him to boost his own contribution. It is, nevertheless, clear that he played a role that none of the others could have played: the dispatch of the letter abroad. All signatories, including Apostol, acknowledged his contribution in this respect, although all were otherwise bitter about Brucan's ability to put himself on the political map of post-communist Romania due to this collective protest. In fact, in analyzing the emergence of this letter, one must take into account that, with no precedent, members of the Romanian communist elite did not have any experience in issuing an open protest. The role of western broadcasting agencies in making them known and even in protecting them was not even acknowledged by all signatories. For some, notably Pârvulescu, this was an internal affair, between them and Ceaușescu, in which the capitalist West must not be involved¹. In this respect, it was Brucan's criticism after the Brașov strike, publicized through a western news agency, which made the initiator, Gheorghe Apostol, understand the importance of getting the West involved as well.

Brucan was also the one who drafted the letter as it became to be known in the West. In fact, as in the case of many other protest letters written behind the Iron Curtain, a piece of paper with the text and the signatures on it did not exist as such. The "letter of the six" was a gentlemen's agreement, as Mănescu put it². After various preliminary drafts, to which all contributed with comments, Brucan was entrusted with the compiling of the final version, since it was he who was to leave Romania for the United States and United Kingdom. How did the letter arrive at BBC, the first news agency which broadcast the letter, it is still unclear. Brucan maintained that, since he was told that the launching of the letter would be more efficient if it was done while in Romania, he first returned from his journey abroad and only after send it. He claims to have managed to fool his shadows and post several copies on 27 February to private addresses in London, for BBC, and in Vienna, for Associated Press. Since after a week nothing happened, he then sent another copy through the political counselor of the American Embassy in Bucharest, who, on his turn, sent photocopies to other embassies, including the British and the Dutch ones³, a story confirmed by the former Ambassador of Holland to Bucharest, Coen Stork⁴. The other part of his story, in which he claims to have sent copies by regular post from Bucharest while under surveillance, does not seem plausible⁵.

¹ Some of the others might not have even thought that the protest letter, to be efficient, must have been sent not only to Ceaușescu, but also to western broadcasting agencies. Pârvulescu, for instance, did not want in any case to involve a western agency, thinking that it was enough to send the letter to Ceaușescu. Even Apostol thought that one of the copies must be, in any case, sent to Ceaușescu directly, and confessed that he was surprised to see that Brucan sent all copies to the West. See Lavinia BETEA, *Maurer...* cit., pp. 282-283.

² IDEM, *Mănescu...* cit., p. 239.

³ Silviu BRUCAN, *Generația...* cit., pp. 199-200.

⁴ Coen Stork, interview by the author, tape recording, Amsterdam, 2 April 2003.

⁵ In fact, Bărlădeanu as well as Mănescu thought that it is more likely that he had left copies of this letter while abroad, with instructions to be broadcast only after his return. See Lavinia BETEA, *Bărlădeanu...* cit., p. 220 and IDEM, *Mănescu...* cit., p. 239.

As for the message of the letter, it must be stated from the very beginning that its content was, in fact, less important than the very fact that finally one such a text emerged from among Romanian party officials. Some of the main points raised in the letter are, however, worth mentioning because of their relevance for the mindset of the signatories and the part of the political elite they represented. On the one hand, although the letter was in the form of an appeal addressed to Ceaușescu as it was decided during the preliminary talks, it illustrates, nevertheless, an explicit quest to be in tune with the spirit that dominated the international meetings in the last decade. If not all, at least the main author, Brucan – conscious that, above all, they were targeting an external audience – included explicit references to the Helsinki process and the observance of human rights. On the other hand, the text perfectly reflects the political culture in which the signatories were socialized, marked by a lack of internal de-Stalinization combined with an unequalled external openness to the West, as it will be further shown.

The letter was composed of three main parts: one dedicated to violations of the Constitution, and implicitly, of the Helsinki Final Act, a second that dealt with the economic crisis, and a third that assessed the errors which deteriorated the international prestige of Romania. The first part opened with a categorical condemnation of Ceaușescu's policy: "The international community is reproaching you the nonobservance of the Helsinki Final Act, which you signed. Romanian citizens are reproaching you the nonobservance of the Constitution, which you swore to respect". The letter continued by providing examples of flagrant violations of the law by the Romanian communist leadership to conclude by a statement inviting Ceaușescu to recognize that "a society cannot function if the authorities, starting from the top, show disrespect for law"¹. Regarding the insistence on the lawlessness of the regime, it is interesting to note that the most absurd points from Ceaușescu's blueprint for Romania or the very activity of the secret police were denounced as simple violations of specific articles of the Romanian Constitution. The systematization plan, which envisaged the forced removal of peasants from their private houses to blocs of flats, was condemned as illegal under the Article 36, which protected the right to personal property. The building of the civic center of Bucharest, which was not included in the public budget, although it represented a huge investment, represented a violation of the Romanian laws regulating constructions and financing. As for the *Securitate*, which, the letter stressed, "was created to defend the socialist order against the exploiting classes", it was detoured from its original task by Ceaușescu, claimed the letter. It was he who directed it "against workers demanding their rights, against old members of the party and against honest intellectuals exercising their right to petition... and freedom of speech", which were guaranteed by Article 34, respectively Article 28 of the Constitution.

From the way in which these points were formulated, the signatories suggested that, during the communist period, it was a time when private property

¹ Since the letter was integrally reproduced in Silviu BRUCAN, *Generația...* cit., pp. 190-194, as well as in Pavel CÂMPEANU, *Ceaușescu...* cit., pp. 287-289, I just briefly mention the other examples of illegal actions by the communist authorities. Harassment for making contacts with foreign citizens was illegal since the decree that forbids Romanian citizens to have such contacts was never approved by the Grand National Assembly. Forced Sunday work was against the provisions of Article 19 of the Constitution and the Labor Code. The violation of mail and telephone conversations represented a violation of privacy guaranteed by Article 34 of the Constitution.

was respected in Romania and its laws, including those regarding construction and finances, were properly designed. Moreover, it was implied that the secret police was originally a necessary institution¹. Obviously, it was very important for all open critiques in East-Central Europe to dress up the condemnation of their communist regimes under the veil of violations of internal laws or international agreements on human rights in order to be better understood by a western audience. However, the way in which the criticism of the six veterans was articulated illustrates that their mindset had remained that of unreformed communists, for whom things went once well in communist Romania.

The second part of the letter concentrated on the economic problems faced by the country due to the mismanagement of industry and agriculture. The text correctly pointed out that the leadership of the RCP was guilty for not being able or willing to analyze the real causes of failures and devise adequate strategies for taking the country out of the crisis. The meetings of the Political Executive Committee were all "past-oriented, urging workers to fulfill the unfulfilled plan of the previous year, previous semester or previous month". Again, as in the case of the *Securitate*, the letter did not denounce the centrally planned economy as being responsible for the bankruptcy of the economy, but clearly stated that "the plan no longer works", as if it was a time when it did. As already noted, Brucan pleaded in his latest book for the introduction of some market mechanisms to reform the economy, drawing from the Soviet model. However, references to such aspects could not be found in the "letter of the six". Since debates on the opportunity of introducing economic reforms never really took place within the framework of the Romanian communist leadership, the critical assessment of the current economic situation in Romania was as past-oriented as the meetings of the Political Executive Committee to which the letter referred to. Just as the leadership in power, the reference point for its critiques was a mythical time of communism, when centrally planned economy allegedly functioned².

Finally, the letter stressed that Ceaușescu's policy had deteriorated Romania's international prestige. At that time, Romania had become increasingly isolated because of the constant refusal to improve its human rights record. In particular, the treatment of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania featured prominently among other cases of human rights violations. In January 1989, the Bucharest communist regime had just expressed serious reservations to the Final Act drafted by the Helsinki follow-up Conference in Vienna because of the specific provisions meant to

¹ The limitations of the letter in this respect were underlined from the very beginning by Shafir in his assessment of the letter, made three days after its release. See Michael SHAFIR, "Former Senior Officials Protest Ceaușescu's Policies", Romanian Situation Report, 29 March 1989, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six.

² In fact, as Daniel Chirot shows, the Stalinist economy, which was primarily based on heavy industry, was more adaptable to central planning. The Soviet model was developed by mirroring a certain age of the capitalist system, characterized by the primacy of steel and organic chemistry industry, which in the West passed away after First World War and was replaced by another phase, that of automobiles and petrochemicals. What drove the communist economic systems into crisis was the competition with western economies in the conditions of the age of electronics. If the steel industry was characterized by a certain degree of inertia, so that it could have been planned to some degree, an industry dominated by electronics, in which new models appear over night, and flexibility represents the key of success, is impossible to plan. See Daniel CHIROT, "What Happened in Eastern Europe in 1989", in Vladimir TISMĂNEANU (ed.), *The Revolutions of 1989*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp. 19-50.

protect minority groups¹. It was in response to this policy that the "letter of the six" denounced Ceaușescu's policy of forced assimilation, which pushed so many members of all ethnic minorities to leave the country. Moreover, they condemned Ceaușescu of being responsible for the growing isolation of the country and for destroying the international relations with the West – Romania had just renounced to the Most Favored Nation clause, while the European Economic Community refused to extend its commercial agreements with this country. In doing so, the signatories pointed out once again to the fact that there was no other way for Ceaușescu than to comply to the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act: "Romania is and remains a European country and as such must advance with the Helsinki process and not turn against it".

As it can be seen, by criticizing only Ceaușescu's constitutional abuses, the letter implied that his communist predecessors distinguished themselves by being law-abiding leaders. Thus, there were many those who felt that, however welcome the letter was given the scarcity of open criticism in Romania, its message was far too limited. As Michael Shafir observed in his assessment of the letter for the Radio Free Europe Research Institute, the signatories "missed what might have been a unique opportunity to confess the error of their involvement in one of the worst periods in Romania's Stalinist past, while adding credibility to their appeal"². In fact, some of the six themselves acknowledged after 1989 that their goal was limited to Ceaușescu's dethronement. As Apostol put it, Ceaușescu must have been ousted from the leadership of the country for his "anti-national and anti-popular policy"³. Since a change of system was seen as impossible at the time, the signatories had hoped to provoke Ceaușescu's ousting by making their criticism towards the supreme leader internationally known. Gorbachev's visit to Bucharest made them understand that even Moscow wanted another leader in Bucharest, one that would pursue in Romania a similar policy with that he was pursuing in the Soviet Union⁴. A change of the system was unthinkable not only in this framework, but,

¹ In January 1989, Romania refused to sign the Concluding Document of this conference, which indeed, with regard to minority protection, went further than any previous documents issued in the Helsinki framework. In the final document, the participating states agreed to "protect and create conditions for the promotion of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities of their territory". This was the first explicit recognition within the Helsinki framework of the principle that a national minority, as a distinct entity from its members taken individually, must benefit from collective rights, as distinct from the individual rights that protect each of its members. For more on this, see Vojtech MASTNY, *The Helsinki Process and the Reintegration of Europe, 1986-1991: Analysis and Documentation*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1992, pp. 245-253.

² See Michael SHAFIR, "Former Senior RCP Officials Protest" ... cit., p. 7. In fact, all across the region, the generation of Stalinist leaders did not ever engage in self-criticism. In this respect, Teresa Torańska's famous book, which encompassed the first interviews taken to some representatives of the generation of Polish Stalinists immediately after the emergence of the Solidarity movement, is very telling. None of the interviewees tried to reassess his past in a critical way, hoping to get some sympathy for acknowledging mistakes. Instead, all took the opportunity to defend the credo of their generation of communists who seized power immediately after the Second World War hoping to build a new and brighter future. See Teresa TORAŃSKA, *Them: Stalin's Polish Puppets*, Harper and Row, New York, 1987.

³ Lavinia BETEA, *Maurer*... cit., p. 283.

⁴ As a diplomat, Mănescu could better understand that Gorbachev's criticism of the Brezhnev era, which targeted stagnation, corruption and nepotism, referred in a very oblique way to the situation in Romania. See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu*... cit., p. 242.

at the beginning of 1989, when the letter was released, it was still hardly envisaged even in Poland or Hungary.

In this respect, Brucan was right when defending the limited content of the letter against its anti-communist critiques, saying that, after all, a political act must not go beyond the level of conscience held by a certain society at a given time¹. His assessment regarding the societal mindfulness was contradicted by the very fact that on 22 December 1989, when Ion Iliescu announced that finally one could unrestrictedly build "socialism with human face" in Romania, the crowds shouted: "No communism!". In short, from the post-communist perspective one can affirm that, indeed, the impact of the letter in Romania at the time was rather limited. From evaluations made by the RFE Research Institute at the time, it resulted that only a third of their sample expressed favorable opinions on the protest. The optimistic interviewees mentioned that its importance lied in the fact that it reflected a split in the party leadership. Others believed that it might influence others to publicly express their dissatisfaction with the regime or, at least, would strengthen the morale of the population at large. The rest had rather pessimistic views, thinking that the letter would not produce any change of the situation in Romania, since Ceaușescu would in any case do only what he wanted².

It is interesting to note that the way in which the letter was commented by the western agencies broadcasting in Romanian – which besides word of mouth represented the almost exclusive source of information for the population – counted very little in the formation of the public opinion inside the country. Among the broadcasters from the Romanian desk of the Radio Free Europe, which was by far the most listened, opinions on the "letter of the six" were mixed. The Munich branch, considering the scarcity of protests in Romania, promoted the letter as an important document coming from inside the RCP. The Paris branch, however, was rather reserved, stressing more the significance of the "letter of the seven", the first collective letter emerging from among the intellectual elite of the country³. Voice of America, which had, nevertheless, a more limited influence on the Romanian audience than the Radio Free Europe, conveyed a different message. In one of his broadcastings, the former dissident poet Dorin Tudoran drew the attention on the fact that the protest of the six had a tremendous international impact. Thus, he argued, the

¹ Silviu BRUCAN, *Generația...* cit., p. 195.

² This represents the result of a survey made by the Radio Free Europe on 241 Romanian respondents, interviewed between 20 April and 16 June 1989. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that awareness of the letter was much higher among people with university education (74%), among men (55%) and among people over 30 of age (53%). 68% of the interviewees mentioned that they had first heard from the radio and 28% from word of mouth. From among those who cited radio as source of information, 63% cited RFE, 9% BBC and 6% Voice of America. See Research Memorandum 1/89, August 1989, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six. For the impact of the letter among the listeners of the RFE, see also Nestor RATESH's program Listeners' Mail no. 109, 2 April 1989, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six.

³ Monica Lovinescu noted in her diary for 27 March 1989: "Browsing the broadcastings of the Radio Free Europe... I can see not only that the letter of the six senior members of the party was broadcast, but also that it was given a (too?) great importance". In the following, she also bitterly observed that the signatories failed to criticize the very essence of the communist system, referring to the Constitution "as if it had been a monument of human rights which, when in power, they would have verbatim respected... Since in Munich there is a lot of fuss over it, I will take the moral laxity of not comment it in my broadcastings from Paris". See Monica LOVINESCU, *Pragul: Unde Scurte V*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1995, pp. 154-155.

Romanians should not ignore it for exactly the same reason that made it interesting for the West: the very position of the signatories within the communist system¹. BBC, which had in Dennis Deletant its main informant, also considered the letter as being of great importance given the previous complete compliance of the prominent party members. In spite of such messages coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain, the six signatories made little impression with their letter among the large strata of the population, which at the time was in a general state of hopelessness. Even those who made their critical voices heard in the following months did not refer to it as to an important document in stimulating further criticism. To this limited impact contributed also the fact that all the signatories had ceased long ago to be public figures, so that for new generations their names meant nothing.

In spite of its small echo inside Romania, the "letter of the six" had a large impact in the West. Besides the relative importance of the signatories, the scarcity of protests coming from Romania made this gesture, however small in comparison with what was happening within other communist parties from the region, be given paramount significance in western newspapers. Press agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press hurried to comment the letter *in extenso*, while on 13 March, three days after the letter was first broadcast by BBC, important dailies, such as *The Independent* in London or *Libération* in Paris, considered the event spectacular enough to allot it long articles². After them, on 15 and 16 March, numerous other prestigious newspapers of various orientations published detailed articles on the letter³. For the first time, criticism against Ceaușescu was more exotic than his craziness, which, for western journalists and editors, until that moment, represented the main point of attraction as far as Romania was concerned.

Beyond the importance conferred by media to this letter, it was the official protest of western governments that really counted. Faced with this unprecedented criticism, the Romanian communist regime reacted in a way reminiscent of the Stalinist period, all the more anachronistic that in the rest of communist Europe the evolution was exactly the opposite. All signatories were taken to the headquarters of the secret police in Bucharest, interrogated, and, although not thrown into

¹ Dorin Tudoran acknowledged in a radio program, later on published in *Agora*, that, although the six were not only just some mediocre *apparatchiks*, but also guilty for contributing to Romania's Stalinization, they had nevertheless made an act of great significance. "Whether we like it or not – Tudoran observed – governments of the world react much more promptly and substantially when such (former or current) political figures are ostracized than in the case when the victims of repression are, let's say, some writers." See Dorin TUDORAN, "România și/sau 'Cazul Arpagic': ieșirea din adolescență", in *Agora*, vol. II, no. 2, July 1989, p. 12.

² It is interesting to note that Nick Thorpe's article published by *The Independent*, besides citations from the letter, speculated on the possibility of having to do with a Moscow-inspired protest. In this sense, it reproduced the opinion expressed by Jonathan Eyal, at the time researcher at the Institute for Soviet Studies, who, although refraining from such risky speculation, acknowledged that a party revolt for the sake of saving socialism might be an ideal formula even for the Soviets. See Nick THORPE, "Socialism discredited", in *The Independent*, 13 March 1989, p. 3.

³ Among the newspapers which published the text of the letter and/or comments on it, were *New York Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the United States; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and *Die Welt* in Germany; *Times* and *The Independent* in the United Kingdom, *Le Monde* and *Libération* in France, *Le Soir* in Belgium, and *Il Giornale* in Italy. The RFE made a detailed press review of the "letter of the six". See Domestic Bloc no. 531, 13 March 1989, and Domestic Bloc no. 533, 15 March 1989, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six.

jail, put under 24-hour surveillance. Bărlădeanu, Brucan, and Mănescu, who due to their former positions within the party had acted at the interface with the West, and were thus better known abroad, were removed from their houses in the residential neighborhood. Mănescu, who tried to oppose, was taken out by force with the help of the anti-terrorist special units¹.

It was this harsh treatment of the signatories that outraged western governments and pushed them to increase diplomatic pressure upon the last Stalinist of Europe². The letter was broadcast one day after the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva adopted the resolution calling for an inquiry into the human rights abuses in Romania. That resolution was voted not only by western countries, but by Hungary as well. This represented an unprecedented split in among the Warsaw Pact countries, among which others abstained from voting instead of displaying solidarity with their "maverick" ally³. Moreover, the letter emerged at the time when the European Parliament, following the hearing on Romania of 21 February, was preparing to vote a resolution condemning the suppression of even basic rights in Romania⁴. In short, the timing of the letter coincided with increased

¹ Bărlădeanu, in spite of the meager and invented accusations of selling on the black market objects from the national heritage fond, meant to transform him into an ordinary law-breaker, was at least moved into another decent house in Bucharest. See Lavinia BETEA, *Bărlădeanu...* cit., pp. 219-227. Brucan and Mănescu were installed in the outskirts of the capital, in village-like areas, in order to be as far as possible from any presumptive contacts with foreign embassies. Especially the latter had to endure the hardships of an existence at the lowest level even by the Romanian standards of the time: in his house in Chitila was raining through the roof. See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., p. 247. Apostol was not removed from his house, and this was used by Brucan as an argument in favor of the fact that he had betrayed the others during the investigations. See Silviu BRUCAN, *Generația...* cit., p. 204. However, none of the other two, neither Bărlădeanu nor Mănescu, confirmed Brucan's accusations. On the contrary, they both rejected such a hypothesis. See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., pp. 248-249.

² Beginning in 1988 in Vienna, the Hungarian communist regime was increasingly critical toward Ceaușescu's policy. In fact, the more absurd Ceaușescu was in the way he was conducting the Romanian internal affairs, the more credible became the accusations brought by the Transylvanian Hungarian minority, backed by the capitalist-friendly Hungarian communist regime. For the exchange of statements between the head of the Hungarian delegation, André Erdős, and the deputy chief of the Romanian delegation, Teodor Meleșcanu, during the Vienna Conference, see Vojtech MASTNY, *The Helsinki Process...* cit., pp. 177-182.

³ The vote was passed with 21 to 7. Besides Hungary, against Romania voted France, the United Kingdom, West Germany, Austria, Sweden, Portugal, and Australia. It should be mentioned that Romania tried to prevent this vote by accusing Hungary of being animated by irredentist goals. Also, the attempt of the Romanian delegation to find backing among the Third World countries, which had the majority in the UN panel, was unsuccessful. In addition, the Romanian expert commissioned to write a report on the human rights abuses in his country, Dumitru Mazilu, was not allowed to travel back to the West, in spite of repeated appeals from the UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar. See Dan IONESCU, "Romania's Growing International Isolation", Romanian Situation Report, 29 March 1989, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 5, File Dissent/General 1989.

⁴ More precisely, the resolution, which was voted on 16 March 1989, condemned: 1) the brutal repression of minorities; 2) the systematization plan; 3) the demographic policy; and 4) the deliberate neglect of handicapped and old people. Among those who testified in front of the European Parliament were Marie-France Ionesco, playwright Eugen Ionesco's daughter, in the name of her father; Ariadna Combes, dissident Doina Cornea's daughter, representing her mother who had been invited, but was not allowed by the communist regime to travel outside Romania; Dan Alexe, at the time a recent refugee in Belgium and a close friend of dissident Dan Petrescu (who was also invited to attend but was not permitted to leave Romania); Ion Vianu, one of the intellectuals who supported the human rights movement of 1977 initiated by Paul Goma,

criticism of Romania from West and East alike, and with an intensification of dissent among intellectuals as well. Following the emergence of the letter, on 16 March 1989, France recalled its Ambassador to Bucharest for consultations and postponed bilateral talks on economic issues in order to show its disapproval of Romania's appalling human rights record. It also warned the Romanian government not to take further measures against the six signatories. On 17 March, Great Britain accused Romania of fragrant violation of human rights, and called for an end to the harassment of the six. West Germany, after the police hampered its ambassador to meet Mănescu, recalled the diplomat to Bonn and canceled a joint meeting on economic issues. When the German Ambassador returned to Bucharest, it brought with him an official invitation for Mănescu on behalf of the Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher¹. The State Department of the United States also warned the Romanian government not to take repressive actions against the six former senior officials or, if not complying, support the consequences². The Hungarian communist government, which was not only increasingly against the Romanian one, but also in favor of a complete rapprochement with "capitalist" Europe, enlarged its criticism against Bucharest, which was until then restricted to the issue of the Hungarian minority. The Speaker of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Istvan Komoroczki, although refraining from speculating on the importance of the opposition in Romania, qualified the "letter of the six" as a major event. Moreover, the Hungarian daily *Nepszabadsag* took the opportunity to praise the six authors for their courage to confront Ceaușescu.

Few days after the letter came to be known in the West, the Romanian news agency, Agerpres, delivered a communiqué of the Prosecutor General, later on published in the central party daily, *Scântea*, in which it was revealed that a grave act of betrayal was uncovered by the secret police. Mircea Răceanu, step son of Grigore Răceanu, formerly employed in the diplomatic service, had – it was said in the respective text – "placed himself at the service of a foreign power" and was "caught in the act". Since 1974, when he was allegedly recruited, Răceanu had been supposedly engaged in an "intensive activity of treason". Consequently, it was stated, he would be put to trial and condemned according to the Romanian laws. Such an accusation of betrayal of state interests was punished at the time in Romania with the death penalty³. After this official communiqué, in the entire country,

since then in emigration in Switzerland; and Mark Almond, a young historian from Oxford, who had recently returned from Romania. See Alain DEBOVE, "Roumanie: Les droits de l'homme devant le Parlement européen", in *Le Monde*, 23 February 1989, p. 3. The interesting thing about this debate was that the testimony of Eugen Ionesco, read by his daughter, was refuted by several socialist deputies on the ground that neither him nor his daughter had been in Romania in the recent years. In this respect, Dan Alexe's presence was salutary, since he could claim that the pieces of information communicated by him were first-hand, since he had emigrated only several months before, in May 1988. Dan Alexe, interview by the author, tape recording, Brussels, 19 July 2002.

¹ See "Romania on the Dock: Persecution of Dissidents and Other Violations of Human Rights", in Romanian Situation Report, 4 May 1989, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six.

² A US senator and a US congressman, who held the positions of Chairman and respectively Vice Chairman of the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, expressed their solidarity with the six signatories who were courageous enough to criticize their leadership for Romania's disastrous situation. See "U.S. Joins International Protests against Romania", OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 18, File Open Letters: The Group of Six.

³ The communiqué was published by *Scântea* and broadcast by Radio Bucharest on 14 March 1989. Agerpres delivered it in English in the same day.

starting with the party organizations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where Răceanu had been employed, meetings in which people asked for the capital punishment were staged¹. Actually, Mircea Răceanu had been arrested on 31 January 1989, and, at the time of the release of the letter to the West, he was already continuously interrogated at the *Securitate* headquarters in Bucharest. He was not only one of the signatories' step son, but, in his former capacity of Deputy Director of the Directorate Five in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which dealt with the relations with Central and South America, was the formal supervisor of Gheorghe Apostol, while ambassador to Brasil. Because of this position in Foreign Affairs, Mircea Răceanu was indeed able to connect Apostol with his adoptive father, as it was revealed by both of them. However, his connections with the unnamed foreign power, which was actually the United States, had nothing to do with the "letter of the six"². Nevertheless, the Romanian authorities seized the opportunity of making him part of the letter affair. Obviously, by connecting the six with a person accused of espionage, the Bucharest authorities could have easily discredited the document by implying that it was inspired by a inimical power, which was trying to interfere in Romania's internal affairs. Moreover, this suggested that the signatories were not persons animated by their concern for the country, but rotten traitors, financially rewarded by a foreign state to denigrate their own.

Consequently, on 17 March, *Scântea* published a long article arguing that any call for the reform of the existing system was if not naïveté, then outright treachery. History had demonstrated, according to the party newspaper, that any attempt to undermine the national independence was preceded by the emergence of "perfidious treacherous watchwords". Although these could apparently seem "an invitation to liberalism and anarchy", so that some people might assume them "with distressing naïveté", they were, in fact, used in "ill faith by treacherous people". "Dishonest intentions", *Scântea* warned, were usually "disguised in different cloak". Since the calling for the observance of human rights launched by this letter came soon after Romania expressed its reserves for the Final Act of the Vienna Conference, the article insinuated that there was a clear connection between these demands and the betrayal of state interests³.

This was by no means a new tactic employed by the communist regime. All critiques of the regime were persuaded in a more or less gentle way to confess that they were serving the interests of a foreign country. In 1977, for instance, Ceaușescu obliquely referred to Paul Goma as to a Judah ready to betray for a couple of silver coins. It was indeed a constant in the political culture of Romanian

¹ The transcript of the meeting held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 14 March was published after the Revolution. See "Cazul Răceanu", in *România Liberă*, 21, 25, 26, and 28 January 1990.

² The memoirs of Mircea Răceanu do not make complete light in this affair since they fail to make any reference to the nature of his connections with the American Embassy in Bucharest. Răceanu mentioned only that, as a diplomat, he had fought with "specific means" against the communist regime. However, his account seems plausible when explaining his implication in the letter affair. Except for the fact that Răceanu facilitated Apostol's contact with his adoptive father, he had only a vague idea about what they were preparing, while the six did not implicate him in their affair. See Mircea RĂCEANU, *Infern '89...* cit.

³ What connection could be between "the alleged 'human rights' claimed by hostile imperialist propaganda" in their attempts to interfere in the Romanian internal affairs and the "legal regulations aimed at safeguarding the interests of the people and their right to build their own destiny freely and independently?" asked rhetorically the journalist from the party daily. See *Scântea*, 17 March 1989, p. 1.

communism to link criticism with treason of the state interests inspired by an inimical country. Until the "letter of the six", the foreign power was implicitly a capitalist one, or, in the case of the Hungarian dissidents, the neighboring eternal enemy. This letter was issued at a time when the Romanian communist regime was criticized by governments from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Considering that this first critical document signed by former party officials emerged at a time when the wind of reform was blowing in the Soviet Union, the Romanian authorities implied that the signatories might have been in the service of Washington as well as in that of Moscow. In this way, the six were accused of contributing, consciously or not, to Romania's growing condemnation by the West and, since the Vienna Conference, by the East as well.

This letter did not stimulate other prominent party members to openly criticize the regime. It did not inspire other non-communist dissidents in their criticism against the regime. The allegedly "revisionist" position of the signatories could have been at the time compared only with that of Ion Iliescu, the first post-communist President of Romania, then a second rank communist official, formerly a member of the Central Committee. Known as being a moderate reformist marginalized by Ceaușescu, Iliescu came into the public attention in the late 1980s due to rumors which credited him as a close friend of Gorbachev from the time spent in Moscow for university studies¹. The director of the Romanian division of the RFE, Vlad Georgescu, commenting Brucan's latest book of 1987, made a parallel between his ideas and those expressed by Ion Iliescu in an article which had appeared earlier in that year in *România Literară*². However, none of the signatories who left us some testimonies, Brucan, Bârlădeanu, Mănescu, Apostol and Răceanu, did mention to have tried to get in contact with him in order to sign the common protest against Ceaușescu. Moreover, Iliescu, who recalls that he was not only continuously supervised by the secret police, but also avoided by former close associates at work, denies to have been seeing any of the six at the time of the letter affair³. That must have been a letter of the veterans, acknowledges Iliescu today, among whom he had no place at the time.

However, when on 22 December, during his first appearance on TV after the Ceaușescu's fall, Iliescu invited all those who could engage themselves in the reconstruction of Romania, he also mentioned the authors of this letter. He referred to them as to the "six veterans of the party, who proved their patriotism addressing to the country, appealing to reason and to [sic!] Ceaușescu"⁴. Nevertheless, the influence of the signatories after the fall of communism was very uneven. As already mentioned, a meeting of all never took place, not even after 1989, when it was allowed. Only three of them, Mănescu, Bârlădeanu, and Brucan, were coopted

¹ In fact, at the time, rumors that credited him as a possible successor to Ceaușescu due to Gorbachev's alleged support were circulating throughout Romania.

² Vlad GEORGESCU, "Reading Brucan," 19 December 1987, OSA/RFE Archives, Romanian Fond, 300/60/3/Box 6, File Dissidents: Silviu Brucan.

³ Iliescu maintains he had seen Mănescu only accidentally on the street, while he had not met Bârlădeanu since the time he was removed from the Central Committee. See Ion ILIESCU, *Revoluția trăită*, Editura Redacției Publicațiilor pentru Străinătate, București, 1995, p. 15. The only persons with whom he acknowledged to have discussed a possible coup were General Nicolae Militaru, the first Minister of Defense after the revolution, General Ion Ioniță, who died of cancer in 1987, before having the chance of doing something, and Virgil Măgureanu, the Director of the Romanian Information Service after the fall of communism. See *ibidem*, p. 34.

⁴ Călin CERNĂIANU, *Diplomația lupilor*, Editura Nemira, București, 1997, p. 117.

in the Committee of the National Salvation Front on 22 December 1989, and only the last two really occupied central positions in the structure of the post-communist power. The others never played any political role after 1989¹.

However, the legacy of the letter was not insignificant in post-communist Romania. As Câmpeanu observed, if not through the very persons who signed it, the "letter of the six" crucially influenced the political life after 1989 by the very fact the team who controlled power came from the same segment of the communist party, that of the veterans: "It was from the group of party veterans that the small team, which taking advantage of the popular wave and the candor of dissidents took over political power, indeed emerged". In fact, the revolution of 1989, Câmpeanu argued, did not oppose anti-communist forces to the existing communist party, but a group of old-timers with reformist views to a dictator who hated reforms. The letter did not provoke the revolution, but it provided the first critical assessment of Ceaușescu's dictatorship, which did not come from the historical parties, but from the highest ranks of the communist party². Indeed, until 1989, Romania was not capable of producing an alternative political force, originated from outside the communist party. The results can be seen even today.

¹ This embittered all those who had been marginalized once again after 1989, as one could see from their testimonies. Pârvulescu was indeed very old at the time of the revolution, but Apostol and Răceanu went to the central Committee Headquarters at the call of Iliescu. Neither him nor Brucan received them. Moreover, on 4 January 1990, Brucan declared on the national TV that he alone was the initiator of the letter, and that Apostol, the real one, as shown before, betrayed all of them during the secret police investigation. For more on this, see also Răceanu, *Infern 89...* cit., pp. 145-155. Mănescu, whose name was on the lips of many as a possible successor to Ceaușescu, had no chance to arrive on 22 December in Bucharest from his arrest house in Chitila. He did not really play an active role in politics after 1989, in spite of the fact that he received a position in the Committee of the National Salvation Front. He enjoyed only the privileges granted to all those who received the so-called certificate of revolutionary, which entitled the possessor to free travel within Romania and tax exemption, an useless privilege for Mănescu since he was already a retired person. See Lavinia BETEA, *Mănescu...* cit., pp. 252-254.

² Pavel CÂMPEANU, *Ceaușescu...* cit., p. 268.